DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 258 CG 027 080

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TITLE	Adolescent Girls: Factors Influencing Low and High Body Image.
REPORT NO	ISSN-1043-8734
PUB DATE	95
NOTE	10p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT	Melpomene Journal; v14 n2 p14-22 Sum 1995
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adolescent Development; *Body Image; *Females; Secondary Education; *Self Concept; *Self Concept Measures; *Self Esteem; Self Evaluation (Individuals); Sex Stereotypes; Sexual Identity

ABSTRACT

Past research on women has indicated that a fear of becoming fat emerges during adolescence and continues into adulthood. This study focused on factors associated with negative or positive body image, such as weight, physical activity, teasing, comparison to others and racial identity. Data was drawn from an eight-page questionnaire completed by 152 girls who participated in YWCA summer programs in various parts of the United States. Findings indicate that low body image was associated with several factors. Many factors concerned weight and included: (1) weight for height; (2) perceived weight; (3) worry about weight; (4) talking about weight; and (5) attempting to lose weight. Other factors associated with negative body image included comparison of appearance to that of others, teasing, wanting to be attractive to boys, negative comments, and lower levels of participation in organized sports. Girls with high body image were less preoccupied with and less worried about their weight, less likely to compare their appearance to that of others, and less likely to report wanting to be attractive to boys. Perceptions of their weight were similar for black and whites girls; however, black girls were more likely to consider themselves attractive, to like the way they looked, and to feel their bodies were competent and capable. Contains 14 references; 9 tables present data and statistical analysis. (TS)

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ED 395 258

Adolescent Girls

Factors Influencing Low and High Body Image

Lynn Jaffee and Judy Mahle Lutter

This paper reports on Melpomene's recent study of body image in adolescent girls. The study focused on factors associated with negative or positive body image, such as weight, physical activity, teasing, comparison to others and racial identity.

Data was drawn from an eight-page questionnaire completed by 152 girls who participated in YWCA summer programs in various parts of the United States.

Our findings indicate that low body image was associated with several factors. Many of them concerned weight and included: weight for height (BMI), perceived weight, worry about weight, talking about weight and attempting to lose weight. Other factors associated with negative body image included comparison of appearance to that of others, teasing, wanting to be attractive to boys, negative comments and lower levels of participation in organized sports.

Girls with high body image were less preoccupied with and worried about their weight than those with low body image. Girls with high body image were less likely than girls with low body image to compare their appearance to that of others or report wanting to be attractive to boys.

Perceptions of their weight were similar for black and white girls; however, black girls were more likely to consider themselves attractive, to like the way they looked and to feel their bodies were competent and capable.

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Review of the Literature

Melpomene's interest in the development of body image in adolescent girls began in 1985. At that time, Bean Robinson, a psychologist working with Melpomene on an amenorrhea study, conducted in-depth interviews with 31 women to assess eating habits and weight issues (11). Robinson found that a fear of becoming fat emerged during adolescence and continued into adulthood. That concern was unrealistic for the sample, which was made up of thin, physically active women whose mean body mass index (BMI) was 19.7 and whose mean body fat percentage was 17%. Further, the study participants continually watched what they ate; some even cut out entire food groups in an attempt to avoid weight gain.

Robinson's findings were supported by Davies and Furnham (1), who documented declining body satisfaction as girls moved through adolescence. In Davies and Furnham's study, dissatisfaction was related to self-perceived weight and body measurements. The study reported dramatic differences: only 19% of the girls who believed they were overweight were satisfied with their hip measurements, whereas 88% of the girls who believed they were underweight were satisfied.

Salmons et al. (12) also reported a decline in body satisfaction during adolescence. They found that deviating from what was considered normal body shape was unpopular for the girls in their study. They concluded, "Many young females appear to lack a sense of individual physical identity .... Girls become more deeply immersed in the slimness culture as they become young adults and meet peer pressure and media incitement to conform."

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In a study of young women seen at a military adolescent outpatient clinic, Moore (7) reported weight and body shape dissatisfaction among normal-weight and underweight girls. In this study, 82% of the girls who indicated that they wanted to lose weight were not overweight. The authors concluded that many young girls have an inaccurate perception of what is normal weight.

Studying a slightly older population of 146 female college undergraduates, Thompson and Heinberg reported on predictors of negative body image and eating disturbances (13). Their findings indicated that "negative verbal commentary" or teasing, specifically about weight or body size, rather than about appearance in general, was a significant predictor of negative body image. Additionally, they found that girls who compared themselves to others were likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies.

Reporting on weight-related behaviors, a recent paper by Nichter et al. (8) offered an alternative to what the researchers term the "dichotomy of dieter/non-dieter." The suggested alternative is "watching" what is eaten. The paper proposed that dieting is a somewhat negative activity with a good chance of failure, but "watching" is a more positive attempt to control weight that involves such behaviors as eating more fruits and vegetables and less fat.

Nichter and Vuckovic reported on conversations among adolescent girls regarding weight and body shape that they termed "fat talk" (9). They found "fat talk" to be pervasive and concluded it was an indicator of preoccupation with weight. The study found that girls talked about being fat for a variety of reasons. While unhappiness with their weight was one obvious reason for "fat talk," girls also engaged in it as a means of social comparison, a way to affiliate with a peer group and as a means of gaining reassurance that they were not, in fact, too fat.

Weight, weight dissatisfaction and body image may differ among girls of different races. Desmond et al. (2) reported that black and white adolescents perceived their weight differently: white adolescent girls tended to perceive themselves as weighing more than they actually did, while black adolescents tended to perceive their weight accurately. Additionally, heavy black girls were less likely than heavy white girls to perceive themselves as overweight.

In their three-year study of adolescent girls, Parker, Nichter et al. reported a greater degree of dissatisfaction with weight and body shape among white girls than among black girls (10). Through interview and focus group data collection, the researchers found that white girls' body image was influenced by a drive toward perfection. The perfect girl described by white respondents often mirrored tall, thin fashion models. In contrast, black girls described the ideal girl as someone with a good personality, confidence and a strong sense of personal style. The authors concluded that white girls tended to have fairly narrow parameters of the ideal, limited somewhat by age and weight. Black girls, on the other hand, tended to be more flexible in defining the ideal, which was defined by inner beauty, clothes, style and movement rather than by age or weight.

Although very little research has been conducted on the relationship of physical activity and self-esteem, Melpomene's work with girls has established a link between them. Jaffee and Ricker (5) found that girls aged 13 to 17 who felt most competent about themselves and their abilities were more likely to participate in physical activities at higher levels than girls who were less confident. Jaffee and Manzer (4) reported similar data for girls aged nine to 12. Girls in both studies derived positive self-esteem from sports through challenge, achievement in sports, risk-taking experiences and skill development. The approval of others related to sports skills also increased self-esteem.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 152 girls aged 11 to 17 (mean 13.24 years) who attended YWCA summer programs in 1994. To achieve a sample that was geographically and racially diverse, the YWCA selected associations in eight states. Since some girls traveled out of state to participate in programs, 12 states and Mexico were represented.

The racial composition of this sample consisted of 5.9% Native American, 16.4% Black/African American, 3.3% Mexican American/Chicano, 3.9% Puerto Rican/other Latin American, 2.0% Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander, 43.4% White/Caucasian, 6.6% Biracial and 8.6% who identified themselves as "Other" and 9.9% who chose "Don't know."

Data Collection

An eight-page questionnaire was devised for data collection. Questions were included to obtain information about perceived weight, worry about weight and dieting or "watching" food behavior. The questionnaire also included items relating to influences on body image, such as comparing appearance to that of others, teasing and comments from others. Questions also were included to determine levels of physical activity and team sport participation.

Because the researchers felt it was important to involve girls in the process at an early stage, we convened focus groups of girls in the target age group of 11 to 17. We met with four groups of girls who attended one of two private schools or one public school in St. Paul, MN. Girls were asked to fill out a pilot questionnaire and comment on the contents in the group setting.

The researchers then revised the questionnaire based on the girls' com-

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ments and suggestions. Examples of changes suggested by the girls involved wording changes as well as placement of particular questions. (For example, the girls suggested placing the demographics section at the end of the questionnaire rather than at the beginning, where they felt it would discourage girls from responding.)

A body image score was determined by adding Likert-type responses from six questions relating directly to body image. Some of the questions included in the score were, "How do you feel you look compared to other girls your age?" and "I like the way I look." Girls who selected mostly positive responses scored lowest on the scale. Therefore, a low score was indicative of higher body image.

Body image scores were divided into three groups. Girls scoring in the lowest third were designated as having high body image. Girls scoring in the middle third were designated as having medium body image, and girls scoring in the highest third were designated as having low body image.

BMI was calculated using the formula:

$$\frac{\text{Weight in kg}}{\text{Height in meters}^2}$$

Developed by the National Center for Health Statistics, BMI serves as a measure of weight for height (14). Normal BMI ranges between 20 and 25. For women, the desirable BMI is between 21.3 and 22.1. A BMI higher than 27.3 for women has been associated with increased risk factors for various health problems, such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

Procedure

Participating YWCA associations were selected by the YWCA of the U.S.A. Melpomene asked it to select sites that would provide national geographic distribution. The selection was also influenced by the availability of summer programs. After initial phone contact by Melpomene researchers, questionnaires were sent to program directors at each participating YWCA with a cover letter that included detailed instructions for administering the questionnaire. Youth directors administering the questionnaires were instructed to have all girls complete the questionnaire at the same time to limit prior discussion. The questionnaires were then returned to the researchers by mail.

Responses to open-ended items on the questionnaires were analyzed for content and coded. Using the JMP Statistics program from SAS Institute Inc., simple frequency distributions for each variable were examined. Statistical relationships between variables were calculated using chi square tests for significance.

Results

Weight

Weight was a primary determining factor of both negative and positive body image for many of the girls in this study. Girls with higher body image reported being thinner (a lower weight for their height, BMI) than did girls with medium or low body image (see Table 1). Girls who said they were trying to lose weight had an average BMI of 21.9. Girls who said they worried about their weight had an average BMI of 21.8, and girls who said they did not worry about their weight had an average BMI of 18.8.

Table 1
Average BMI by Body Image Groups

	BMI (Mean)
Low (N=26)	22.3
Medium (N=76)	20.3
High (N=50)	18.6

The girls' assessment of their weight played a key role in their body image. When the subjects were asked to place themselves in one of five categories, which ranged from very underweight to very overweight, those with low body image tended to rate themselves as overweight or very overweight more often than girls with medium or high body image (see Table 2). Of the girls with low body image,

Table 2
Girls' Perceptions of Their Weight

	Low Body Image N=26	Medium Body Image N=76	High Body Image N=5
Very underweight	3.9%	0	0
Underweight	3.9%	5.3%	12.0%
About the right weight	26.9%	67.1%	78.0%
Overweight	53.9%	27.6%	10.0%
Very overweight	11.5%	0	0

chi square p<.001

65.4% rated themselves as overweight or very overweight, a rating chosen by 27.6% of the girls with medium body image and 10% of the girls with high body image.

Weight Loss Efforts

Discontent with weight was more prevalent among girls with low body image. Those with low body image were more likely to report trying to lose weight and less likely to report doing nothing about their weight than those with medium or high body image (see Table 3). Girls with high body image were most likely to say they were not trying to do anything about their weight. Girls with medium and high body image were somewhat more likely to report trying to maintain their weight as it was, but few girls, regardless of body image, said they were trying to gain weight.

Attitudes Regarding Weight

Worry and preoccupation with weight were related to negative body image. A strong statistical relationship ($p < .001$) existed between girls who worried about their weight and low body image. When asked, "Do you worry that you weigh too much?" 69.2% of the girls with low body image group said yes, compared to 47.4% of girls with medium body image and 18% of the girls with high body image.

Talking about Weight

The amount of time the girls reported talking with friends about feeling fat differed greatly according to body image. Those with low body image said they talked about feeling fat more often than the girls in the other two groups (see Table 4).

There was a strong relationship between positive body image and *not* talking about being too fat. The majority of girls with high body image (79.2%) said they talked to their friends about feeling fat "hardly ever" or "never," compared to 36% of girls with low body image.

Table 3
Responses to "What are you trying to do about your weight?"

	Low Body Image N=26	Medium Body Image N=76	High Body Image N=50
Lose	73.1%	48.7%	24.0%
Gain	7.7%	2.7%	8.0%
Stay the same	7.7%	27.6%	22.0%
Nothing	11.5%	21.1%	46.0%

chi square p<.001

Table 4
Frequency of Talking about Being Fat

	Low Body Image N=25	Medium Body Image N=75	High Body Image N=48
All of the time	0	0	2.1%
A lot of the time	28.0%	9.3%	2.1%
Sometimes	36.0%	32.0%	16.7%
Hardly ever	8.0%	29.3%	31.2%
Never	28.0%	29.3%	47.9%

chi square p<.005

Teasing

Girls with low body image said they were teased more often than the girls in the other two groups. Of the girls with low body image, 57.7% reported being teased "sometimes" to "almost always," while that same frequency of teasing was reported by 43.4% of the girls with medium body image and 30% of those with high body image.

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Comments from Parents

Although the frequency with which parents commented on the girls' appearance and achievements did not seem to affect body image, the content of parental comments was important. The body image scores of girls who said they received negative comments from parents were much worse than the scores of those girls who said they received positive comments. This was true of parental comments on both appearance and achievement.

Girls' Perceived Influences on Body Image

Given a list of 25 choices to answer the question, "What things influence how you feel about your appearance?" the items that differed significantly according to body image were "losing weight," "my weight," "my shape or figure" and "wanting to be attractive to boys" (see Table 5). All of these four choices were selected as influences more often by girls with low body image than by girls with medium and high body image.

Comparison with Others

When asked how frequently they compared their appearance to that of others, 52% of the girls with low body image responded "almost always," compared to 7.9% of the girls with medium body image and 4.3% of the girls with high body image. There was a strong statistical relationship between comparison to others and body image satisfaction ($p < .001$).

Table 5
Influences on Feelings about Appearance

	Low Body Image *N*=25	Medium Body Image *N*=76	High Body Image *N*=50	Chi Square
Losing weight	56.0%	21.1%	10.0%	p<.001
My weight	56.0%	40.8%	18.0%	p<.005
My shape or figure	56.0%	36.8%	24.0%	p<.05
My wanting to be attractive to boys	56.0%	25.0%	18.0%	p<.005

Table 6
Responses to "If you compare your appearance, to whom do you compare yourself?"

	Low Body Image *N*=26	Medium Body Image *N*=75	High Body Image *N*=50	Chi Square
Other girls my age with perfect bodies	65.4%	30.7%	14.0%	p<.001
Older girls with perfect bodies	34.6%	26.7%	8.0%	p<.01
Models in magazines, TV, newspapers, videos, etc.	46.2%	18.7%	14.0%	p<.005
Movie stars, dancers professional athletes	38.5%	18.7%	8.0%	p<.005
Teachers	19.2%	2.7%	2.0%	p<.005

When asked to whom they compared themselves, girls with low body image said they compared themselves more often than girls with medium and high body image to other girls with "perfect" bodies, older girls with "perfect" bodies, models, entertainers and teachers (see Table 6).

The concept of a "perfect" body was important to girls with low body image, who were more likely to choose an item if it included that phrase. For example, "other girls my age with 'perfect' bodies" and "older girls with 'perfect' bodies" were chosen more often than "other girls my age" or "older girls."

Change in Body Image

During adolescence, body image tends to change for girls, becoming increasingly negative (1, 12). When asked whether and why their feelings about their appearance had changed during the previous two years, three of the answers varied significantly, according to body image (see Table 7). Girls with low body image were much

Table 7
Responses to "If your ideas about your appearance have changed in the past two years, why?"

	Low Body Image N=20	Medium Body Image N=71	High Body Image N=48	Chi Square
I have gained weight	60.0%	39.4%	22.9%	p<.01
I have been teased about my weight	35.0%	16.9%	4.2%	p<.005
I began to compare how I look to models in magazines, TV, etc.	30.0%	5.6%	8.3%	p<.005

more likely to report their feelings about their appearance had changed because they had gained weight, had been teased about their weight or had begun to compare themselves with models.

Physical Activity

Since we were particularly interested in the relationship between physical activity and body image, we asked several questions on this topic. The girls were asked how many school sports teams they played on. Playing on a higher number of school sports teams was indicative of better body image. Body image became increasingly positive with an increase in participation on sports teams. A question about participation in sports teams organized outside the school setting produced the same result.

In examining level of participation in physical activity (days per week), we found no significant differences between the low, medium and high body image groups. About half of the girls in each group (low, 50%; medium, 56.6%; high, 55.1%) were active five or more times per week. One-quarter of the girls with low body image were active two or fewer days per week, compared to 10.5% of girls with medium body image and 14.3% of girls with high body image. Girls with low body image were most likely to be physically active seven days a week (33%). Eighteen percent of the girls with medium body image and 26.5% of those with high body image reported participating in physical activity seven days a week.

Body Image Differences by Racial Identity

When our data was analyzed according to racial identity, both similarities and differences emerged. Our sample included sufficient numbers to run chi square tests of significance only for black and white girls and, in some cases, for Native American girls.

Overall, 44% of black girls had a high body image, compared to 31.8% of white girls and 33.3% of Native American girls.

White girls and black girls responded in a similar manner regarding their opinion of their weight. Sixty-eight percent of the black girls and 68.1% of the white girls said they were "about the right weight." However, black girls who identified themselves as "about the right weight" had a mean BMI of 20.9, compared to 18.8 for white girls. Black girls who classified themselves as "overweight" had a mean BMI of 24.3, compared to 23.0 for white girls who classified themselves as "overweight."

The percentage of black, Native American and white girls saying they were "about the right weight" was nearly

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Table 8
Comparison of Appearance by Race

	Native American N=9	Black/ African American N=25	White/ Caucasian N=65	Chi Square
I don't compare	11.1%	44.0%	13.9%	p<.005
Other girls my age	66.7%	36.0%	69.2%	p<.01
Older girls with perfect bodies	22.2%	4.0%	24.6%	NS
Models in magazines, TV, newspapers, etc.	22.2%	4.0%	23.1%	NS

identical. White girls were slightly more likely to report "worrying that they weigh too much." Thirty-two percent of black girls, 33.3% of Native American girls and 40.9% of white girls said they worried about weighing too much.

When asked if they were trying to lose weight, 44% of the black girls and 39.4% of the white girls answered affirmatively.

Despite these similarities between girls of different races regarding weight, some stark differences emerged when the girls were asked about body image in general. For example, when asked to select choices ranging from "very attractive" to "very unattractive" in response to the statement, "I think of myself as," 40.0% of the black girls considered themselves "attractive" or "very attractive," compared to 9.1% of the white girls ($p < .01$). Also, 36% of the black girls said they "always like the way they look." This differed significantly ($p < .001$) from the 3% of the white girls who said they "always like the way they look."

When asked to respond to the statement, "I feel competent and capable about my body and the things it can do," 36% of the black girls said that statement was "always true" for them, compared with 7.6% of the white girls ($p < .01$).

Table 8 illustrates the differences regarding comparison of appearance. The black girls reported comparing their appearance to others less often than either white or Native American girls. Native American and white girls showed similar patterns in comparing themselves to "other girls my age," "other girls with perfect bodies" and "models."

While differences existed, influences on body image were not clear-cut by racial identity (see Table 9). For example, external judgments of body image tended to influence white girls and, in some cases, Native American girls more than black girls. "Being teased" and "wanting to be attractive to boys" were cited as influences by white and Native American girls more often than by black girls. Clothes and hair were cited as influences more often by black and Native American girls than by white girls.

Discussion

Similar to earlier research, this study found that girls overestimated their weight. Girls with low body image reported the highest BMI of 22.3, which is considered a healthy weight for height. Girls with medium and high body image who considered themselves overweight had even lower BMIs (medium, 22.3; high, 22.7). Higher actual weight for height and higher perceived weight status were associated with low body image.

Dissatisfaction with weight, as indicated by desire for weight loss, worry about weight and conversation with friends about weight, was related to low body image. Our data support research by Nichter and Vuckovic (9), who describe "fat talk" as a means for girls to increase self-esteem.

Comments from others, most frequently in the form of teasing, were related to low body image. While the adolescent years are typically a time of developing independence from parents and focusing more on peers, parents' comments still had an impact on the girls in this sample. Girls who reported receiving positive comments from their parents, both on appearance and on achievements, had a more positive body image than the girls who reported receiving negative comments from their parents.

Both the need for peer acceptance and the fact that girls' bodies are changing and maturing make girls vulnerable to comments and teasing. A seemingly innocuous comment regarding weight or body shape may be taken as negative, spurring concern with weight and weight loss. For many girls, being attractive to boys seemed to be linked to becoming thin

Table 9
Influences on Perceptions of Appearance by Race

	Native American *N*=9	Black/ African American *N*=25	White/ Caucasian *N*=65	Chi Square
How I actually look	88.9%	40.0%	66.2%	p<.05
My clothes	66.7%	68.0%	40.0%	p<.05
How I think I look compared to other people	11.1%	8.0%	33.9%	p<.05
How well I do in school, sports and other activities	44.4%	24.0%	44.6%	NS
Being teased	33.3%	4.0%	24.6%	p<.05
My hair	66.7%	40.0%	33.9%	NS
Wanting to be attractive to boys	66.7%	0	27.7%	p<.001

and beautiful. This idea is repeatedly reinforced in the media.

The study participants, especially those with low body image, reported that their body image was influenced by feedback from the people around them. This may be either direct feedback, such as comments, teasing and "fat talk,"or indirect feedback, such as comparing themselves to models, teachers and other girls.

Conversely, the girls with high body image tended not to look outside themselves to define their body image. Girls with high body image tended not to talk about being fat, didn't compare themselves to others as often as girls with low body image and tended not to care as much about wanting to be attractive to boys.

Comparison to others occurred more frequently among girls in the low body image group. The girls who suffered from low body image turned to the people around them to help define their body image. After "other girls my age with perfect bodies," models were chosen most by girls with low body image as the target of their comparisons.

With media portrayals of "ideal" beauty equated with thinness and marketing efforts toward women and girls centered around makeovers and products or changes to meet that ideal, it is not surprising that girls, especially girls with low body image, compare themselves to the images they see in the media. Additionally, movie stars, dancers and professional athletes, chosen third by girls with low body image, typically achieve the same thin, idealized bodies portrayed in the media.

In addition to comparing themselves to others, girls with low body image reported that teasing or negative comments and approval or acceptance from boys influenced how they felt about their bodies. These findings are supported by Harvard researcher Carol Gilligan (3) and her colleagues, who have extensively studied the development of adolescent girls. They have found that during adolescence, girls are more likely to make relationship-based decisions. Girls tend to be more susceptible than boys to what others will think and are concerned with being good and being liked.

While this report focused predominantly on factors associated with negative body image, the data also identifies factors associated with positive body image. Girls with high body image reported less preoccupation with weight than the girls with low body image. Fewer of those with high body image worry that they weigh too much.

In addition, *not* talking about feeling fat was related to high body image. Girls with high body image compared their appearance to that of others less frequently than girls with low body image. They were less likely than girls with low body image to report that "losing weight," "my weight," "my shape or figure" or "wanting to be attractive to boys" influenced how they felt about their looks.

While participation in higher numbers of sports teams was associated with increasingly positive body image, participation in physical activity (measured by days per week) was not related to body image.

In a previous Melpomene study of girls, physical activity and self-esteem, sports team participation was found to be a source of self-esteem through approval from parents, friends and peers. The girls in that study also cited team participation as helpful in making them feel capable and competent about their bodies (5).

Our findings indicate that while both black and white girls have similar opinions about their weight, their idea of body image in general may be very different. For white girls, body image and weight are strongly linked. There does not seem to be the same strong link for black girls. Despite similar feelings about weight, the black girls felt much more positive about their body image in general, suggesting that for black girls, weight is only a piece of the body image whole.

Our results also indicate that the black girls tended not to look to other people to define their body image. They compared their looks less often and said that comments or being teased did not influence their feelings about their appearance. None of the black girls said that wanting to be attractive to boys was a factor in determining body image.

Data from Native American girls did not yield clear patterns. Other-based factors, such as being teased and wanting to be attractive to boys, as well as comparing their appearance to that of others, played a role in influencing body image for Native American girls. However, such factors as hair and clothing were also strong influences.

While very little information exists on body image in Native American girls, McCartney et al. replicated Carol Gilligan's research in a population of Ojibwa girls in North Dakota (6). Similar to Gilligan's findings, McCartney et al. found that for Ojibwa girls, maintaining relationships and searching for autonomy were both important but sources of conflict. Additionally, for Native American girls, making relationship-based decisions meant considering community as well as family and friends.

In light of the absence of research on this topic, as well as the small number of Native American girls in this sample, it is difficult to make definitive statements regarding this population. Further study is needed to begin to understand the development of body image in Native American girls.

The black girls tended to have more positive body image than the other girls in this study. Parker, Nichter, et al. also reported greater body image acceptance among black girls than among white girls. They found that black girls "expressed ... a sense of self and style based on making

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what they had work" (10). In contrast, white girls spent more time engaged in comparing themselves to others and in what Nichter and Vuckovic called "fat talk" (9). Both activities tend to have negative impact on body image. As Parker, Nichter et al. state, "Comparing themselves to other girls and failing to measure up to the standards of beauty they self-imposed made some girls feel badly about themselves" (10).

These differences among black, white and Native American girls strongly suggest a need for further research to explore the development of body image, including factors that precipitate positive body-image, within various communities.

Conclusion

The study found that low body image was influenced by weight for height (BMI), perceived weight, worry about weight, talking about weight and attempting to lose weight. Comparison to others, teasing and wanting to be attractive to boys were associated with low body image. Girls with low body image reported receiving more negative comments and lower levels of participation in organized sports teams than girls with medium or high body image.

Those girls with high body image were less preoccupied with weight than girls with low body image, and fewer with high body image worried that they weighed too much. Not talking about feeling fat with friends was related to high body image, and girls with high body image compared their appearance to others less often than girls with low body image. Girls with high body image reported weight issues or wanting to be attractive to boys as influences on their appearance less often than girls with low body image.

Racial differences were associated with body image in several areas. Black girls were more likely to report high body image than either white or Native American girls. For black girls, saying they were "about the right weight" was equated with higher BMI (black girls: 20.9; white girls: 18.8). Attempts to lose weight were similar among black and white girls. However, black girls were more likely than white girls to consider themselves attractive or very attractive, to always like they way they looked and to report feeling competent and capable about their bodies and the things they could do. Black girls also reported comparing their appearance to others less often than white or Native American girls.

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Acknowledgements

For their help with this project, we thank Alpha Alexander, YWCA of the U.S.A., and participating YWCA associations; Karen Copeland, Hanna Cooper, Gloria Massey, Beth Hoel, Senja Nelson, Como Park High School, Girl Scout Troop #1154 at HIM-St. Luke's School, St. Paul Academy and Summit School. ●